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ABSTRACT

This brief note is a description and invitation to educators, practitioners, and researchers to participate in AEDNET, a special network of electronic mail created for people in adult education. The description of AEDNET provides a history of the network and lists current and future benefits of AEDNET. Information is then presented on joining AEDNET (Adult Education Network). Finally, the pluses and minuses of electronic mail are discussed. (YLB)

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AEDNET: An Electronic Network for Adult Education

By Barbara M. Florini and Daniel Vertrees

People throughout the world are using their computers to speed up and facilitate communication. This means of communication is commonly referred to as electronic mail or e-mail. The following describes and invites you to participate in AEDNET, a special network of e-mail created for people in adult education.

About AEDNET

AEDNET (Adult Education Network) is a computer-based information sharing network of educators, practitioners, and researchers having a special interest in adult education. Through this network you can communicate via your computer with many other people having similar interests. AEDNET is international in scope, including 60 participants from institutions in the United States, Australia, Chile, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United Kingdom who are using this medium for international information-sharing in adult education.

The year-old network was established as one of the activities of the Syracuse University Kellogg Project, which is investigating new ways of information storage and retrieval in adult education. AEDNET differs from some electronic mail systems by providing participants with a system facilitator or moderator who can set up special interest groups (i.e., literacy, technology, gerontology, self-directed learning), disseminate and transfer information relevant to adult education, and generally facilitate communication among users on the network. AEDNET participants are invited to suggest ways to enhance the system, identify bugs, invigorate the activities, and improve the quality of the information exchange that takes place.

Current and future benefits of AEDNET include the following:

1. Exchanging electronic mail (e-mail)
2. Soliciting on-line reactions to your research
3. Conducting on-line discussions with selected groups of colleagues
4. Collaborating on papers
5. Participating in computer-mediated conferences
6. Receiving the Syracuse University Kellogg Project newsletter electronically
7. Receiving and writing articles for the graduate students' electronic journal

People already on AEDNET have been receiving the Kellogg Project newsletter electronically. In September, AEDNET users who wished to do so were able to participate in a computer-mediated conference under the auspices of Deakin University in Australia. The graduate students published the initial issue of their electronic journal, *New Horizons in Adult Education*, in December. It featured the article "Adult Education in Nicaragua: Adapting and Growing in a Changing Reality" by Samuel Simpson, the Managua Regional Director of Adult Education in Nicaragua. Plans are now underway to incorporate AEDNET in some research activities.

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Joining AEDNET

There are neither registration fees nor membership fees for joining AEDNET. The only costs you might incur would be any fees charged by your institution for using its computer network. You need just three things to participate: (a) a computer, (b) a modem, which is a device that lets your computer communicate with computers over telephone lines, and (c) access to the computer network called BITNET, which is available at many institutions of higher education. Future plans include dial-up access to AEDNET so that people not on BITNET or one of the gateway networks to it will be able to participate for the price of a phone call.

If joining AEDNET interests you, follow one of these three steps:

1. *If you're not familiar with electronic mail* and cannot find someone at your site who can explain it, call Dan Vertrees (315-423-1095) or write to him at The Kellogg Project, 113 Euclid Avenue, Syracuse, New York 13244 for an introduction.

2. *If you are now on BITNET* and want to join AEDNET, just send a message to AEDNET@SUVM. You might like to indicate any special interests in adult education that you have and tell a bit about yourself.

3. *If you know something about electronic mail* but are not currently using it, call your local college or university computing office and find out if your institution belongs to BITNET or any noncommercial network, like Internet or UUPC, having gateways to BITNET. If your institution is participating in one of these networks, get an account for yourself, learn to use the mailing software at your site, and, finally, forward a message to AEDNET@SUVM saying you'd like to become a member. There are international gateways to BITNET, so don't let a mere national boundary or ocean keep you from joining.

The Pluses and Minuses of Electronic Mail

There are many advantages to electronic communication. The quick, at-our-convenience response option lets us be productive in ways not previously available. For example, one message can be sent to any number of people without having to make separate copies for each recipient. Electronic mail puts an end to the dreadful game of telephone tag by letting you send, receive, and respond to messages whenever it suits you. In this it is similar to using a postal service that can deliver your mail at the speed of a telephone service. Electronic mail helps us focus our attention on the intellectual content of the message, much like print material does, rather than having it filter through our biases about gender, race, disability, personal appearance, or national origin. Electronic communication also opens new cooperative research avenues as we explore the medium and the way it affects what we choose to do.

As is the case with other electronic mail systems, information distributed through AEDNET is not private in the sense that a letter going through the U.S. mail is private. It is widely recognized that computer center staff members could read the messages going through their systems but probably have neither the time nor interest to do so. Messages could also end up in a computer archive during the routine backup procedures that are performed in computing centers. People who receive your messages can e-mail them to others, either as-is or altered, as easily as you sent the message. There are also social concerns—only people having the necessary technology can participate in electronic mail networks. A fuller discussion of these factors is beyond the scope of this paper; it seems only fair to point them out when inviting participation on the network.

Summary

AEDNET is an international electronic network of people interested in adult education. Participants can communicate easily through a single electronic address: AEDNET@SUVM. The network offers a variety of features and is looking for ways to expand and improve its information service. You are invited to join and help us explore this medium for communicating among adult educators. **AAACE**

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